

**“The Life You Save May Be Your Own” by Flannery O’Connor:  
Questions for Discussion and Writing**

1. From what **point of view** is the story told? Why do you think O’Connor chose this approach?
2. Describe Tom Shiftlet. Does his name have any descriptive significance? How might his physical characteristics be seen as a reflection of his psychological characteristics? Discuss the significance of the sentence “he had a look of composed dissatisfaction as if he understood life thoroughly.”
3. Describe Lucynell Crater and her daughter Lucynell. Does their name have any **symbolic** significance? What is their life together like, and how does this state of affairs influence the mother’s attitudes and actions? What revealing details does the narrator present to depict them?
4. What goals do Tom and Lucynell (the mother) have in the story, and how do these goals conflict? How do they go about achieving their goals—what strategies do they use? What significance do these goals have for them?
5. What does Tom seem to think about society and humanity? (Consider, among other things, his references to the human heart.) What factors can we infer might have influenced this worldview? Discuss his sense of morality. Why do you think he does not seem to feel conflicted or guilty about his own actions in the story?
6. Discuss O’Connor’s use of **foreshadowing** in the story. What clues does the narrator give us about the characters’ intentions and later developments in the story?
7. Discuss O’Connor’s use of **irony** in the story. Cite specific examples. How might the story be seen as an ironic version of a romantic story?
8. How would you interpret the **thematic** and **figurative** significance of the story’s title? Discuss the worldview and theme(s) that the story seems to be expressing.